

New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services
Consumer and Environmental Health Services
Lead and Asbestos Program

Environmental Justice Initiative Summary Report

October 1, 1996 - September 30, 1997

Background

Environmental justice is summarily defined as the joint effort of environmental and civil rights advocates in ensuring that no one individual or group is disproportionately burdened by environmental hazards due to race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status. On February 11, 1994, President Clinton signed Executive Order No. 12898 committing the federal government to environmental justice principles. In response to this commitment, the Lead and Asbestos Program implemented an environmental justice initiative as part of a lead training and certification grant from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Our primary goal is to empower community based organizations and individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to combat childhood lead poisoning through the reduction of environmental exposures to lead. Our target population for providing education and outreach is low and moderate income families with children under the age of six years and women of childbearing age. In early 1997 we developed a partnership with Check-Mate, Inc., a non-profit community based organization located in Asbury Park, Monmouth County. Check-Mate, Inc. was established in 1979 with the purpose of providing a variety of social programs to the community including health care, youth services, child care, referral services and the development, management and sponsoring of affordable housing. Asbury Park is one of several New Jersey cities selected to participate in the Governor's Urban Initiative Program and has had a high incidence of childhood lead poisoning cases.

Community Needs

In discussions with Check-Mate, Inc., the following problems and needs were identified:

- O Check-Mate, Inc. staff and constituents needed lead awareness training to complement their existing community outreach initiatives.*
- O Check-Mate, Inc. weatherization department personnel required training to avoid lead exposures to themselves, their families, as well as to the community they serve.*
- O Piggy-backing onto Check-Mate, Inc.'s mobile health unit initiative would be an efficient way to discuss and distribute lead information one-on-one with the public. The mobile health unit serves as a mechanism in providing health care services to individuals lacking access to other available health care resources.*
- O English and Spanish language literature targeted to low-literacy, minority populations and children was needed for distribution.*
- O The distribution and discussion of lead hazard information was lacking at local health fairs and other similar community functions.*

Who are Check-Mate, Inc. constituents?



To ensure we are reaching out to target populations as well as to make certain key lead poisoning prevention messages are comprehended, a questionnaire is administered to Check-Mate, Inc. constituents attending our outreach presentations. The questionnaire is first administered prior to our presentation to gauge the audience's baseline knowledge of lead issues. After the presentation, the audience is requested to flip the questionnaire over (where a second, identical copy of the questionnaire is printed) and

again answer the questions. Questions posed include basic demographics (sex, age, race, education) as well as lead specific questions including: who is primarily affected by lead poisoning; the primary source of lead exposures in children; effective household cleaning methods; and the role nutrition plays in childhood lead poisoning prevention.

In summary, the majority of individuals attending our presentations were minority women of childbearing age. Approximately half of questionnaire respondents had children under the age of six years living in their household. Most respondents knew very little about lead poisoning prevention; however, the same respondents demonstrated a measurable improvement following our outreach efforts.

How We Met Community Needs...

O Five lead hazard awareness presentations were provided to Check-Mate, Inc. and their constituency (e.g., Inter-Community Care Center/Head Start of Monmouth County; STOP Program at Brookdale Community College).



O Check-Mate, Inc. weatherization department employees were provided New Jersey certified lead abatement worker training. This training equipped them with the knowledge and skills necessary to protect themselves, their co-workers and residents from lead-based paint

hazards associated with routine work activities involving weatherization improvements (i.e., window and door replacement).

O Literature written in the English and Spanish languages and targeted toward minority populations was identified, purchased and distributed through presentations, the mobile health unit, local health fairs, and Check-Mate, Inc. headquarters.



O In an effort to reach out to community constituents who may lack access to other available health care resources, we staffed a mobile health unit in partnership with Check-Mate, Inc.'s HIV screening and awareness staff on several occasions.

O A resource and information table was staffed at the Hispanic Affairs and Resource Center of Monmouth County "Healthy For Life Fair" celebrating Minority Health Month. Information on lead and lead-based paint hazards was discussed and distributed to fair organizers and participants.

O To assist Check-Mate, Inc. staff in conducting lead outreach, arrangements have been made to have two Check-Mate, Inc. staff attend the course entitled, "Lead Poisoning Prevention-Train the Trainer Course," offered by the New Jersey Citizen Action, New Brunswick, New Jersey. The course covers a range of topics including how to overcome cultural, language, literacy and educational barriers when teaching individuals about lead poisoning prevention and tracking individuals whom you assist.

O Giveaways were purchased and distributed during the course of our environmental justice presentations. The giveaways, which have educational messages printed on them (e.g., "wash your hands before you eat," "get the lead out") and/or our Department and Service name and telephone number to call for further information, serve to remind and reinforce information provided during our presentations.

O We have successfully established a lead resource library which includes a video lending component.

Exploring New Initiatives...

Future initiatives include partnerships with other community based organizations and low income housing groups that serve target populations in order to provide lead training opportunities to their building maintenance personnel and property management staff. *For example, during this reporting period, arrangements were made so that two AmeriCorps (an international youth organization headquartered in Newark, Essex County) volunteers could attend a United States Department of Housing and Urban Development Lead Remodeler's Training course at no-cost to their organization.*

Conclusion

In developing partnerships with community based organizations, forces are joined in the fight against childhood lead poisoning. The partnership established with Check-Mate, Inc. opened doors for us with the Monmouth County community that Check-Mate, Inc. serves. We look forward to expanding and enhancing our current lead hazard reduction activities with other community based organizations in an effort to develop new and exciting partnership initiatives.

Contact Information...

Richard M. Ritota is the Program Manager of the Lead and Asbestos Program. Julie Petix, M.P.H., C.P.M., is the Project Manager of the Exams & Permits Unit and serves as the Principal Investigator for the EPA lead grant. Both Ms. Petix and John Ramos, Public Health Representative, are available to provide presentations on lead hazard issues. Mr. Ramos is fluent in the Spanish language and can provide presentations to accommodate Latino/Hispanic constituents. We may be reached at P.O. Box 360, Trenton, NJ 08625, (609) 984-2193, e-mail address: jp2@doh.state.nj.us.